1. Introduction

Audio description has been part of university training for almost two decades with much more interest generated within recent years. AD has been frequently taught as part of audio-visual translation or media accessibility courses or programmes. This chapter presents AD training in the academic context. We first present an overview of competences involved in AD creation as mentioned in the literature and use this overview to propose an audio description competence model as derived from currently the most widely accepted model of translation competence (PACTE, 2003). We also present pedagogical approaches taken by trainers and described in the literature to develop courses, activities and assessment procedures. The second part of the chapter presents results of a survey encompassing 57 trainers and 93 courses (ADLAB PRO, 2017) to verify to what extent the proposed competence model and pedagogical approaches suggested in the literature are reflected in the actual practice of AD training at universities.

2. Audio description competence (ADC) model

The majority of research on audio descriptor skills and competences is based on the researchers’ own experience (both as professional audio describers and trainers) and observations. Recently, a call has been made (Mazur & Chmiel, 2021; Mazur & Vercauteren, 2019) to create a model of audio description competence based on PACTE’s seminal translation competence model (2003). What follows is an attempt to systematise all the skills and competences related to AD in the literature so as to arrive at an audio description competence (ADC) model proposal based on PACTE’s model (2003, 2017) and a list of competences for translator training (Hurtado Albir, 2015), as well as being based on a classification of audiovisual translation competences drawn up by Cerezo Merchán (2018). The components of the final version of PACTE’s model are called sub-competences while both Hurtado Albir (2015) and Cerezo Merchán (2018) use the term competences to denote individual components of translation or audiovisual translation competence. We follow the same naming convention; we refer to sub-competences when describing a proposed audio description competence model and...
mention competences when referring to Hurtado Albir’s (2015) or Cerezo Merchán’s (2018) classifications.

PACTE’s model (2003) of translation competence includes five sub-competences and an additional block of psycho-physiological components. The sub-competences involve either declarative (i.e., knowing what) or procedural (i.e., knowing how) knowledge, roughly corresponding to either theoretical knowledge or practical skills.

The first element of PACTE’s model of translation competence (2003) is bilingual sub-competence that includes “predominantly procedural knowledge required to communicate in two languages” (PACTE, 2017: 39). It is reflected in contrastive competence identified as important in translator training (Hurtado Albir, 2015) and focuses on monitoring interference. Cerezo Merchán (2018) also lists this competence as crucial for acquiring audiovisual translation competence through training. However, in the case of audio description we should talk about a linguistic, rather than bilingual, sub-competence as part of AD competence. As such, the importance of an excellent command of one’s native language (if we assume that AD is only created in the audio describer’s mother tongue, which might not always be the case) is mentioned widely throughout the literature on AD training (Orero, 2005), especially as regards vocabulary (Díaz-Cintas, 2007b; Hyks, 2005; Matamala & Orero, 2007) that should be “objective, vivid, imaginatively drawn” (Snyder, 2007: 100). According to PACTE (2003), this sub-competence should also include the knowledge of both pragmatic and sociolinguistic conventions, which is also reflected in AD literature: Matamala (2006) mentions excellent command of linguistic conventions, while both Matamala (2006) and Navarrete Moreno (1997) stress the importance of adapting the linguistic style to the target audience by using various linguistic registers. Other components of the linguistic sub-competence include creativity and linguistic sensitivity and the ability to edit and revise texts (Díaz-Cintas, 2007b).

Extralinguistic sub-competence (PACTE, 2003) includes declarative knowledge about the world and specific areas of expertise as well as bicultural knowledge about the source and target cultures. Acquisition of this sub-competence via university training should focus on mobilising the knowledge involved in order to solve translation problems (Hurtado Albir, 2015). Cerezo Merchán (2018) complements this sub-competence in the context of audiovisual translation by adding knowledge of the target audience and its specific characteristics, film and theatre knowledge, film language and visual semiotics. In the case of audio description, this ties in nicely with the powers of observation required from an audio describer (Hyks, 2005) and one of Snyder’s (2007) four pillars of audio description: observation, understood as visual literacy and being an “active see-er” (Snyder, 2007: 100). Other researchers also underline the importance of knowledge of cinematography and history of the arts (Díaz-Cintas, 2007b; Navarrete Moreno, 1997). Díaz-Cintas (2007b) includes a large bicultural competence component in his classification of skills important for AD. He emphasises general knowledge of visual impairments and accessibility and extensive knowledge of the world of blindness in order to know the needs of the AD target audience and to adopt appropriate audio describing strategies without being condescending (by providing unnecessary information). As Matamala and Orero (2007: 329) write: “[t]hose who work with accessibility have to be aware of their roles as social intermediaries since they make available a metaphoric ramp – taking the simile from architectural accessibility – to audiovisual material”. Díaz-Cintas (2007b) stresses the importance of knowing the difference between blindness and visual impairment and of knowing the nature of various visual dysfunctions. Such knowledge may translate into awareness of the heterogeneous nature of the AD target audience and appropriate strategic choices when drafting AD. He also emphasises the need to know legal requirements regarding AD provision.
and “thorough knowledge of the theory and practice of AD in all its dimensions” (Díaz-Cintas, 2007b: 54).

Instrumental sub-competence is procedural in nature and involves the use of external sources of information, tools and technologies (dictionaries, parallel texts, corpora, search engines, software). In the case of audiovisual translation, this sub-competence involves mastery of strategies to retrieve information and other resources and mastery of audiovisual translation software and specific software to process and convert audiovisual files (Cerezo Merchán, 2018). Díaz-Cintas (2007b) includes similar elements under his technological or applied competences crucial for audio description. They include general computer literacy, willingness to update software and learn new tools, use of AD software and advanced IT skills.

Knowledge of Translation sub-competence (PACTE, 2003) includes declarative knowledge about the profession and practice of translation (such as translation strategies, coping with problems, work market specificities). It is related to occupational competences (Hurtado Albir, 2015), such as operating appropriately on the translation market. The counterpart of this sub-competence in the ADC model will be the Knowledge of AD sub-competence. In his classification of AD competences, Díaz-Cintas (2007b) lists specific details regarding the knowledge of the market, such as knowledge of remuneration rates, in-house and freelance job characteristics, knowledge of specific companies that provide AD services, as well as knowing how to find customers and assignments; in other words, how to proactively operate on the market.

Strategic sub-competence, the crucial part of PACTE’s model, might be considered a procedural reflection of the Knowledge of Translation sub-competence. The latter includes declarative knowledge about translation; knowing what it involves and what should be done to successfully complete the translation task. Strategic sub-competence, on the other hand, is knowing how to apply the Knowledge of Translation in practice and it is “an essential sub-competence that affects all the others since it creates links between the different sub-competences as it controls the translation process” (PACTE, 2017: 40). It activates other sub-competences, identifies translation problems and applies strategies to solve them. According to Hurtado Albir (2015), this sub-competence should be developed through training by using appropriate strategies to solve translation problems. In the context of AD, we believe that the most crucial part of strategic sub-competence is what Snyder (2007) calls edition: the ability to choose what is critical and relevant to understand and appreciate the work of art. This is also underlined by Hyks (2005), Matamala (2006) and Matamala & Orero (2007). More specific strategies involved in the strategic sub-competence might be related to, for instance, choosing appropriate ways to name and/or describe characters, facial expressions and gestures (Chmiel & Mazur, 2014), using filmic language to reflect film editing or foreshadowing or signposting (“ITC Guidance on Standards for Audio Description”, 2000), such as describing the visuals before they are seen because synchronisation of AD with the image is impossible (because a new scene in a new location begins with dialogue, for example).

Strategic sub-competence is central to PACTE’s model as it links together declarative and procedural knowledge from all other sub-competences. Similarly, in the ADC model, it provides for proper application of linguistic, extralinguistic, instrumental and knowledge of AD elements to arrive at successful audio description. Let us consider some examples of potential links between the strategic sub-competence and other components of the model. For instance, strategic and linguistic sub-competences might be involved whenever AD requires the ability to synthesise information in order to fit the text to the limited space, while maintaining the original meaning (Matamala, 2006; Matamala & Orero, 2007). This is done by means
of reformulation and synonyms (Vidal, 2004). Strategic and extralinguistic sub-competences might be drawn upon when the audio describer takes into consideration the knowledge of the heterogenous needs of the AD target audience and decides both to describe and to explain the meaning of a lesser known gesture visible on the screen (Mazur, 2014). Instrumental sub-competence will be used alongside the strategic one, for instance, when the audio describer has to work with a video file written in the format unsupported by the typically used AD software. Then, IT literacy and willingness to learn new tools might become important as the audio describer is forced to look for ways to convert the file into a different format. The link between the strategic sub-competence and the knowledge of AD sub-competence is much more obvious if we perceive the two as procedural and declarative reflections of the same knowledge. Thus, the audio describer knows what linguistic tools might be used to make audio description more dramatic in order to reflect a fast action scene. This declarative knowledge is put into practice as the audio describer uses short simple sentences with verbs dynamically depicting developments on the screen.

The last elements of PACTE’s model (2003) are psycho-physiological components. They are individual in nature and not specific to translation. They include, among others, memory, work organisation skills, motivation, creativity and logical reasoning. They are sometimes known as transversal competences, soft or transferable skills that can be used irrespectively of a profession. In this context, Hurtado Albir (2015) mentions instrumental, interpersonal and systemic competences listed by González and Wagenaar (2003), including organisation and planning, interpersonal skills, ethical behaviour, project management and teamwork. Cerezo Merchán (2018) mentions team development and project organisation as important for audiovisual project management. More specifically, Díaz-Cintas (2007b) includes the following personal and general competences as relevant for AD competence: ability to self-learn; ability to think quickly, to relate ideas and react rapidly; organisation, planning and information management skills; ability to think critically in problem-solving and decision-making processes; labour flexibility and ability to work under stress and time constraints; willingness to work in a team; ability to act as an expert mediator in multicultural environments. This last ability is especially important for AD since the audio describer represents the interests of the AD target audience.

The audio description competence model based on PACTE’s (2003, 2017) model will thus include two predominantly declarative sub-competences (extralinguistic and Knowledge of AD) and three predominantly procedural sub-competences (strategic, linguistic and instrumental), as well as psycho-physiological components.

An important note should be made here. For the sake of simplicity, the ADC model proposal put forward here refers to the most basic format of AD creation: drafting the description in the audio describer’s native tongue to be later recorded by a voice artist. Thus, it does not include abilities involved in AD translation and oral delivery. However, audio description is sometimes created not from scratch but translated from another language (usually English) and many scholars underline the importance of AD translation competence (Jankowska, 2015; Matamala, 2006; Matamala & Orero, 2007). Similarly, AD might sometimes be delivered by its author, rather than a professional voice talent, for instance during live events. Vocal skills, good oral expression and excellent diction are thus also viewed as crucial for the audio description competence (Díaz-Cintas, 2007b; Matamala, 2006; Matamala & Orero, 2007; Snyder, 2007). In the former case – translation of audio description – the model should comprise both audio description competence and translation competence components. This means that linguistic sub-competence should reverse back to bilingual sub-competence and Knowledge of AD should include both AD and translation. In the latter case, vocal skills
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should be incorporated into the model, most probably at the junction of psycho-physiological components and strategic sub-competence.

3. Pedagogical approaches

This section focuses on discussion of pedagogical approaches applied most frequently to AD training in an academic context. In her discussion of audiovisual translation training in general, Cerezo Merchán (2018: 469) mentions the social-constructivist approach as “endorsed by most translator training specialists” and competence-based training with a combination of project- and task-based learning activities. All these are in fact intertwined and also present in AD training literature.

The social-constructivist approach to translator training was outlined by Kiraly (2000), who claimed that learners construct knowledge through learning. His approach triggered a major shift from teacher-centred models, in which teachers transmit knowledge and learners passively acquire it, to student-centred models based on collaboration, close-to-real or authentic translation projects. In the latter teachers play a much less crucial role as facilitators and guides rather than the ultimate authorities. The objective of training is to make students fully-fledged members of the professional community (Kiraly, 2000) and this is where this approach links with competence-based learning since by acquiring competences students will be able to smoothly transition into the professional context. This approach was also identified by Chmiel et al. (2019) as the general framework to be used by AD trainers in developing their AD courses.

Competence-based training is considered as stemming from socio-constructivist learning approaches (Hurtado Albir, 2015) and is seen as an integrated approach that focuses on acquiring competences and shaping learning activities, course content and assessment procedures accordingly. It integrates “knowing what” with “knowing how”, which is reflected in PACTE’s translation competence model (2003) in sub-competences that are predominantly declarative or procedural. This approach also focuses both on competences that are profession-specific and on those that are transferrable. This division is also reflected in PACTE’s model and the ADC model derived from it – bilingual and instrumental sub-competences and psycho-physiological components do include skills that can be equally important in non-translation contexts. The competence-based approach was used in an AD course described by Matamala and Orero (2007). The authors first identified competences to be developed during classes and then reflected them in the learning outcomes identified for the course. A similar approach was used in the ADLAB PRO project (ADLAB PRO (2018), Chmiel et al. (2019) and Perego in this volume).

Cerezo Merchán (2018) notices that current translator training programmes integrate task- and project-based approaches. The former is more teacher-centred and is used in initial stages of training, followed by the latter approach that is more student-centred and in line with the social constructivist framework. Examples of authentic projects used in AD courses include drafting AD for a whole film screened at a film festival or preparation of AD and software testing for a museum project (ADLAB PRO, 2017). During these projects students have to work in a group and coordinate their activities with external stakeholders (festival organisers, disability officers in a museum).

Assessment is an important part of university training. In the context of audiovisual translation in general, Cerezo Merchán (2018) advocates holistic methods, based more on formative (i.e., continuous) rather than summative (end-of-course) assessment. Although trainers are aware of the importance of formative assessment, summative assessment is also frequently
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used in academic courses due to external constraints (exam or credit requirements) (Cerezo Merchán, 2018; Kajzer-Wietrzny & Tymczyńska, 2015).

An interesting approach that evaluates both the process and the product of AD drafting is applied as an exam procedure for a course presented by Kajzer-Wietrzny and Tymczyńska (2015). The students select a clip that can help them showcase what they had learned, prepare AD and write a report listing AD challenges, strategies applied and justification of their choices. During the exam, they read out their AD script live or present a recording, present the information included in the report and engage in a discussion with the examination committee, whose members can ask additional questions about specific solutions. The detailed exam criteria are divided into those pertaining to information transfer and language and those focusing on technical aspects. The former involves selection of relevant information, application of appropriate strategies and using natural, concise, vivid and objective language. Technical aspects encompass synchronisation and market-readiness of the script (understood as delivering the script in a form that is easy to read with a proper pace, fits the soundtrack and does not require any changes in the recording studio).

Marzà Ibañez (2010) presents detailed evaluation criteria used for assessing audio descriptions in the academic context at her university. These criteria are formulated as errors that are identified in evaluated ADs by teachers but can also be used by students to guide their learning process. General errors include, for instance, unclear phrasing, register inconsistencies, lack of coherence and unsolved extralinguistic references or cultural implications. More detailed errors are classified into three main categories: linguistic transfer (vague vocabulary and improper style), pragmatic and intersemiotic transfer (addition of non-intended pragmatic information, describing obvious elements or suppression of vital information), time management (lack of synchronisation).

The most comprehensive AD assessment proposal so far has been put forward by Fryer (2019), who used parallels between live audio description and conference interpreting and adapted interpreting rating scales by Lee (2008). Lee’s (2008) original rating scales include six macrocriteria. Each macrocriterion has six bands with scores from one to six. Each band explains the learner’s achievement necessary for granting the learner a given score. One means very limited achievement and six means complete achievement. Fryer (2019) has used and adapted four microcriteria: accuracy, language, delivery and synchrony. Accuracy is understood as “[t]he quality of faithfully conveying the visual information of the source text with semantic and pragmatic equivalence, i.e. reproducing the same meaning and intended effect” (Fryer, 2019: 175). Six points are given for accurate reflection of the visual information and intended effect, while one point is given for the message that is incoherent and inconsistent with the source text. The language criterion focuses on vivid and appropriate expressions, delivery reflects quality of public speaking and enunciation, while synchrony involves timing and the AD link with the soundtrack. Although created with live AD in mind, these rating scales can be used for assessing AD quality in academic courses if the delivery criterion is assigned less weight in the total grade than the remaining criteria. One also has to remember that these scales address the quality of AD only and would not be helpful in assessing such skills developed during courses as teamwork and collaboration.

4. AD training in practice – survey results

In order to show how AD training proceeds in practice at universities, this section presents results of a survey taken among audio description trainers working in the academic context across Europe. It was conducted as part of the ADLAB PRO project to identify existing AD
training practices. The original survey focused on both academic and non-academic AD courses (ADLAB PRO, 2017) but subsequently we report on academic training only and discuss the obtained results in the context of the ADC model proposed previously. We first present the profile of the trainer and then the profile of an AD course, including such elements as competence elements trained, activities used and course assessment. Where relevant, we also provide examples from cases studies of three university courses (ADLAB PRO, 2017).

4.1 Trainers

The following profile of an AD trainer in the university context is based on data from 57 trainers who responded to the ADLAB PRO survey (ADLAB PRO, 2017) and declared they teach AD at a university. 88% of them described themselves as university teachers, 65% as researchers, 51% as audio describers, 26% as a representative of a company providing audio description and 9% declared they were either a voice artist or a representative of a non-profit organisation. The percentages do not add up to 100 because each respondent could choose more than one role. 44% of the respondents also teach AD in non-academic contexts, such as conducting training sessions for museum or theatre employees. They are well experienced in teaching AD since 69% claimed they had between three and ten years of experience, 12% claimed they had more than ten years of experience and only 19% had less than three years of experience. Approximately one third of them has taught more than three courses in the last three years, another third has taught two courses and the rest – one course only. When it comes to the total number of students who have participated in all of their academic AD courses in the last three years, 44% of the trainers claimed there were more than 60, 18% – between 41 and 60, 18% – between 21–40, and 20% – fewer than 20.

One third of the trainers claimed they used AD but none of them did that because of visual impairment. Cooperation with visually impaired consultants while teaching was quite frequent: only 30% of trainers never or rarely do that. Every fifth trainer always cooperates with such a consultant when teaching, 17% do it often and 33% – sometimes. This shows that university trainers are aware of the vital input of AD target users in the learning process.

The geographical distribution of the survey respondents was as follows: 39% of the respondents teach in Spain, 23% in Poland, 14% in Italy and 10% in the UK and Belgium. This distribution largely reflects the ADLAB PRO team composition but also shows which countries are at the forefront of including AD courses in university curricula. The respondents have also taught in Switzerland, Australia, the United States and Qatar. When it comes to languages in which the respondents teach AD, English is predominant (49%), followed by Spanish (44%) and Polish (33%). These results partially reflect the geographical distribution of the respondents, but also show that English is frequently used – potentially in countries that do not have long traditions in providing AD and lack language-specific standards.

Film AD is the most frequently taught AD type at universities with 93% of respondents claiming they include this type in their courses. This is followed by AD for museums (51%), theatre (33%), other live events (25%), AD of visuals in teaching materials (21%) and opera AD (16%). Other AD types mentioned by the respondents included book and press illustrations, online AV content, dance, photography, football matches, heritage sites and architecture.

4.2 Courses

The information on AD courses presented here is based on data provided by the respondents for 93 different academic courses focusing on AD. These courses are offered at
master’s level (61%), bachelor’s level (20%) and as part of other types of post-graduate programmes (18%).

Only 41% of the sampled courses are separate courses with primary focus on AD. Audio description is more frequently part of other courses, for instance related to accessibility, audiovisual translation or translation in general, especially as from a theoretical point of view, AD is viewed as an intersemiotic translation (Díaz-Cintas, 2007a; Jakobson, 1959).

Most of the courses are in the form of traditional in-class instruction (76%), while only some include remote learning (14%) or blended learning (10%) components. When it comes to the duration of the courses, there were 18% of courses lasting 21–30 hours and 18% courses longer than 30 hours. However, the most frequent duration of a course was less than ten hours (33%) or 10–20 hours (30%). These results are clear in the context of the course characteristics. The majority of courses included AD as one of the topics covered and this is why the duration (specified in hours) is rather short. As AD courses are usually practical in nature, they include rather small groups of students: 59% of the courses were offered to 10–20 students, 26% to groups of 20 or more students and 15% to small groups of ten or fewer students.

### 4.3 AD competence

Components of the AD competence that were deemed relevant for the academic courses are presented in Table 31.1 in the order of importance. The score is based on a five-point Likert scale, where five meant very important and one – of no importance.

Perfect command of the native language was deemed the most important as a basic requirement for a professional audio describer. Following are components specific for AD competence, both practical (such as editing [Snyder, 2005], or choosing the information to be described and choosing AD strategies) and theoretical (such knowledge of the target users’ needs and specialist knowledge, i.e., cinematography, theatre, etc.). Technical aspects (including timing and text compression) are deemed as more important than IT related skills. The relatively low importance of IT skills and using appropriate software is explained by Mazur and Chmiel (2021) by limited access to professional software at universities (although low-end free web-based services are available) and low applicability of existing IT solutions to AD types other than film, such as theatre or museum AD. Vocal skills are also low on the list most probably because the exercises focus on authoring rather than delivering AD, since AD – depending on the context and the local market – may be delivered by a professional voice talent. The least important AD competence component is the ability to reflect filmic language

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AD competence components</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perfect use of mother tongue</td>
<td>4.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing the most relevant information to describe</td>
<td>4.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing appropriate AD strategies (e.g., deciding when to name a character)</td>
<td>4.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of the needs of the visually impaired</td>
<td>4.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technical aspects (editing, timing, text compression)</td>
<td>4.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge of cinematography, theatre, arts and/or semiotics of the image</td>
<td>3.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IT related skills (using appropriate software, etc.)</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocal skills</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting filmic language (editing and camerawork) in AD</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
University training

(such as editing and camerawork) in AD, which might be considered an advanced skill that is not practiced in shorter courses due to limited time.

Transferrable skills – those that are not AD-specific but might be transferred and applied in non-AD related contexts – were mostly deemed important on the similar five-point Likert scale. Efficient work organisation and management ranked first (scoring 4.30 out of 5.00), followed by observance of ethics (4.26), self-development (4.23) and teamwork (3.96). Ethics is crucial since AD users are a heterogenous group of people with specific needs that need to be considered and respected. Teamwork is also quite important since many ADs are produced in teams and specific teamwork related skills are necessary to be successful on the professional market.

AD competence components that are considered relevant and important for university training are included in all sub-competences of the ADC model. The perfect use of the mother tongue is the essence of the linguistic sub-competence. Choosing the most relevant information to describe and choosing appropriate strategies belong to the strategic sub-competence. They are linked to the Knowledge of AD sub-competence, since audio describers should acquire both declarative and procedural knowledge related to information and strategy selection. Knowledge of the needs of the visually impaired and knowledge of cinematography and other arts are part of the extralinguistic sub-competence. What are considered here as technical aspects (editing, timing, text compression) constitute strategic sub-competence in the ADC model and also belong to the Knowledge of AD sub-competence in the declarative dimension (i.e., knowing about specific ways to edit the description). The same pertains to reflecting filmic language: theoretical knowledge about ways to do it in AD is part of the declarative Knowledge of AD sub-competence, while practical application of this theoretical knowledge belongs to the strategic sub-competence. IT related skills belong to the instrumental sub-competence while vocal skills span across strategic sub-competence and physiological components. Transferrable skills, in turn, are part of psycho-physiological components of the AD competence.

Table 31.2 presents AD competence components developed in a specific course.

This ordering is largely a reflection of the ranking of competence components deemed important presented in Table 31.1. One exception is the command of the native tongue, which is probably considered a given and not focused on in terms of practical exercises. However, it is quite interesting to see a big gap in the data presented in Table 31.2 – with the majority of courses focussing on AD drafting and raising awareness of the AD target user’s needs and less than one third focusing on other skills, such as voicing, recording, using software and AD translation. This can most probably be explained by the limited time of the academic courses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AD competence component</th>
<th>Percentage of courses that develop a given competence component</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD drafting</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising awareness of the needs of people with visual impairment</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD voicing</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using AD software</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD recording</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We have to bear in mind that AD is not always the sole focus of a separate academic course. Thus, trainers might simply have no time to spend on practicing less important skills, such as voicing and recording. Also, in the professional workflow, such tasks might frequently be completed by dedicated practitioners (voice talents and sound engineers) while students focus on AD authoring. It is also interesting to note that almost every fourth course includes translation of existing ADs into the students’ mother tongue. Since AD services in the United Kingdom and the United States have the longest history (Chmiel & Mazur, 2014) and the volume of English ADs is immense (given that VOD services such as Netflix offer English-language ADs to some of their content), it is both cost- and time-efficient to translate ADs rather than create them from scratch (Jankowska, 2015). Thus, translation exercises are also included by the trainers in their courses. The other reason might be that AD is frequently taught as a type of audiovisual translation and as part of translation courses. It might thus be treated as an opportunity to practice interlingual written translation, as well.

In the context of the ADC model, it seems that the courses focus mainly on developing the strategic sub-competence and its links to linguistic and Knowledge of AD sub-competences. This is what AD drafting usually includes applying knowledge of specific AD strategies when using linguistic tools. The courses also focus on the extralinguistic sub-competence and knowledge of the AD target users.

### 4.4 Activities

The activities used in class most frequently included practical exercises (91% of courses), analysis of existing ADs, presentation of AD theory (84%) and discussion of AD guidelines (84%). It seems that these courses successfully combine theory with practice. Students are provided with theoretical knowledge (based on guidelines, research articles and projects), exposed to good (or not so good) examples when analysing existing ADs and later on they receive plenty of hands-on experience in drafting AD. Other activities listed by the respondents included action research projects with partners and stakeholders, translation of existing ADs, peer correction of AD scripts, blindfolded activities and teamwork. Blindfolded activities (either watching a film without AD while blindfolded or walking around a building blindfolded and being guided by an assistant) are a good example of raising awareness of the AD target users’ needs. Teamwork exercises prepare students for collaboration when drafting AD in professional contexts. All these activities develop the following sub-competences from the ADC model: the extralinguistic sub-competence through showing the needs of the AD target audience, the Knowledge of AD sub-competence through familiarising students with guidelines and AD examples, the strategic sub-competence through practical AD drafting, psycho-physiological components through projects and cooperation with stakeholders. The only sub-competences not developed explicitly through activities mentioned by the survey respondents are the linguistic and the instrumental: the former because it might be treated as a prerequisite and the latter due to limited access to software or limited course duration.

### 4.5 Assessment

Participants’ performance is assessed on a continuous basis (formative assessment) through active participation in class activities (83%), homework (68%) and as a final course credit obtained for end-of-course projects involving AD preparation (71%), tests (27%) and research papers (15%). The respondents also identified other course passing requirements (formative assessment), such as participation in authentic projects (which might involve AD of
documentaries shown at a film festival), creation of “a real piece of work that is made public and evaluated by stakeholders”.

The courses researched as case studies in the ADLAB PRO project (ADLAB PRO, 2017) included both formative and summative assessment. Formative assessment took the form of quizzes for reading assignments, qualitative and quantitative assessment of homework and peer evaluation. Summative assessment included drafting AD for a short film and writing a research paper that discussed applied AD strategies. In another course students had to choose a movie clip and prepare AD for it. The chosen clips had to be pre-approved by the teacher as those that presented sufficient challenges for AD. The script (submitted in a file created in the subtitling software used in the course for AD preparation) had to be accompanied with a commentary explaining and justifying the students’ AD choices. These had to be based on the relevant AD literature and guidelines. It is worth noticing that summative assessment procedures for both courses included a reflective practice to gain insight into the students’ process of AD creation and knowledge construction.

It seems that the current AD teaching practice in the academic context largely reflects what has been identified as important AD competence components in AD literature and included in the proposed ADC model. Due to time limitations, strategic sub-competence, Knowledge of AD and extralinguistic sub-competence are prioritised. Courses include both teacher-centred and student-centred activities and integrate formative and summative assessment procedures.

5. Future directions

As audio description shifts from traditional to integrated – from an additional service for those who need media accessibility to a built-in feature developed alongside the audiovisual content in collaboration with the artists – so shifts the profile of an audio describer (Fryer, 2018). Fryer (2018) emphasises the sensitivity towards the needs of people with sight loss as an important part of AD competence. She envisions the shift in the audio describer profile as moving away from that of an independent decision-maker who can choose strategies and is solely responsible for his or her descriptions towards a team player closely collaborating with the source text creators. For instance, language of AD may be monitored by the artists to better reflect the artistic expression. Additionally, the shift might mean more responsibility on the part of audio describers to advocate the needs and rights of the blind and visually impaired (Fryer, 2018). These interesting developments in the area of media accessibility will surely trigger changes in the audio describers’ desired competences; university-based training will hopefully follow suit and adjust the sub-competences trained to meet market requirements.

6. Further reading


The article presents a theoretical reflection on teaching accessibility (including AD) in general and introduces the concept of a pedagogy of accessibility, a systemic approach to teaching accessibility based on the social model of accessibility and a universalist account of access.


This paper includes detailed descriptions of AD scripting exercises used by the author, an experienced AD trainer, in her courses, including introductory exercises, AD translation tasks, exercises that aim
at learning and questioning the existing audio description guidelines, and tasks developing collaborative AD scripting skills.


The article focuses on competences of audio describers for art museums and presents a sample curriculum. The course includes an authentic project in the form of a museum internship during which students draft scripts for guided tours. The internship is described in detail and set in the context of social constructivist training.


The publication describes training materials that can be used by AD trainers or for self-study by AD learners. The materials were prepared as part of the ADLAB PRO project and are available online.

### 7. References


University training


